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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

Reporting period from 28 February 2015 to 26 June 2015

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) since my previous report of 28 February 2015 (S/2015/147).

2. The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and along the Blue Line remained generally calm, despite the tense regional context and following the serious breach of the cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel on 28 January (see S/2015/147). Overall, despite escalatory rhetoric on both sides, the Lebanese and Israeli authorities displayed resolve to maintain calm along the Blue Line, continued to engage constructively with UNIFIL through the established liaison and coordination arrangements and reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). There was no progress, however, on their outstanding obligations under the resolution and no movement towards a permanent ceasefire.

3. My Special Coordinator has remained closely engaged with the Governments of Israel and Lebanon, and with all Lebanese parties, in an effort to preserve the calm in Lebanon and ease political and security tensions. Fighting between Hizbullah and extremist armed groups from the Syrian Arab Republic, including the Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), in the border region of Qalamoun presents an ongoing risk for the safety of the populations living in the Beqaa, particularly the town of Arsal. The Lebanese Armed Forces deployed heavily around the town in recent weeks and clashed with extremist armed groups, including the Nusra Front and ISIL, to prevent further infiltration attempts into Lebanon. During the reporting period, there were continued incidents of shooting, shelling and air strikes from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon.

4. Despite the threat posed by insecurity along the border area between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, the security situation across most of Lebanon was relatively stable during the reporting period. Security plans for the southern Beqaa valley and southern suburbs of Beirut continue to be implemented. The security forces carried out a number of arrests of alleged militants planning terrorist attacks, including individuals suspected of belonging to the Nusra Front and ISIL.

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Negotiations to secure the safe release of Lebanese soldiers and security personnel seized by the Nusra Front and ISIL in August 2014 have continued.

5. On 25 May, Lebanon marked one year without a president of the Republic. Twenty-four parliamentary sessions to elect a new president have been inquorate owing to the continued boycott of the proceedings by members of Hizbullah and of the Free Patriotic Movement from the 8 March bloc. In the context of the presidential vacancy, on 19 May my Special Coordinator co-chaired a meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon at the invitation of Prime Minister Tammam Salam at the Grand Serail in Beirut. The Group expressed concern over the vacuum in the presidency and its negative impact on the ability of Lebanon to address the security, economic and social challenges facing the country. The Group called on all Lebanese leaders to adhere to its Constitution and to the Taif Agreement and the National Pact, to put the country's stability and national interests ahead of partisan politics and to show the necessary leadership and flexibility to urgently resolve the issue. The Group also agreed on the need for sustained, unified international support to preserve the country's stability and security.

6. Syrians fleeing the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continue to seek shelter in Lebanon. As at 4 June, there were 1,171,929 Syrian refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon. In May, the Government of Lebanon asked UNHCR to suspend registration of new refugees.

II. Implementation of resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

7. Ground violations of the Blue Line, mostly by shepherds and farmers, were consistent with the seasonal pattern of the corresponding period of the previous year. The Blue Line violations took place mainly in the areas of Shab'a Farms, Bastara (Sector East) and Rumaysh (Sector West). Most ground violations were brief, but on occasion shepherds with their flocks and farmers stayed south of the Blue Line for several hours, despite calls by UNIFIL to return north of the Blue Line.

8. The most serious ground violation of the Blue Line occurred on 10 March, when six men in civilian attire, later identified as part of the Lebanese Armed Forces intelligence branch, crossed south of the Blue Line, south of Kafer Chouba (Sector East). The Israel Defense Forces fired several warning shots before the men returned north of the Blue Line. UNIFIL conducted an investigation into the incident and shared its findings and recommendations with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces on 17 April.

9. On 9 June, a small group of civilians, including a member of the Lebanese Parliament and journalists, held a peaceful demonstration at the Blue Line to protest recent construction works by the Israel Defense Forces on a patrol track and the placement of concertina wire south of the Blue Line in the Shab'a Farms area. Several demonstrators briefly crossed south of the Blue Line and hoisted a Lebanese flag on the wire located approximately seven metres south of the Blue Line, despite

calls by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces for the protestors to remain north of the Blue Line. UNIFIL used its good offices to impress upon the parties the need to ensure that there was no rise in tension or escalation and prevent any destabilizing activity.

10. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued almost daily with unmanned aerial vehicles, and often with fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets. UNIFIL also observed a number of Israeli overflights using helicopters. The Lebanese Government protested the violations. UNIFIL protested the overflights and urged the Israeli authorities to halt those violations of resolution 1701 (2006).

11. Israel also continued to occupy northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and of Lebanese sovereignty. Further to my earlier reports, Israel has not responded to the proposal by UNIFIL, submitted to both parties in 2011, concerning security arrangements aimed at facilitating the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the area. The Lebanese Armed Forces conveyed in July 2011 its approval of the proposal. UNIFIL has renewed its efforts to facilitate the secure use by Lebanese civilians of the road lying north of the occupied area.

12. The latter part of the reporting period has been characterized by escalatory rhetoric involving claims by both Hizbullah and Israel of their preparedness for any possible resumption of hostilities across the Blue Line. The Israel Defense Forces continued to allege that Hizbullah was maintaining military infrastructure and equipment inside populated areas in southern Lebanon and that unauthorized weapons were being transferred into the UNIFIL area of operations. In a letter dated 27 May addressed to me (S/2015/382), the Permanent Representative of Israel stated that Hizbullah was using "dozens of villages in southern Lebanon as military staging grounds, civilian centres as weapons depots and its people as human shields". The letter referred to media reports as revealing of Hizbullah's "varied efforts to bypass" resolution 1701 (2006), asserting that "the threats are very real and the danger is imminent". The letter further stated that Israel would hold the Government of Lebanon responsible for any attack originating from its territory and reserved the right to take all necessary measures in self-defence. In a letter dated 10 June addressed to me (S/2015/428), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon recalled complaints of Lebanon about Israeli "standing contravention" and "ongoing violations" of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. The letter further complained that Israeli officials had made "serious threats" on the Lebanese Government, had sought to "intimidate its people" and had spread allegations "in order to justify what they call the inevitable future war".

13. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL does not proactively search for weapons in the south. UNIFIL cannot enter or search private property unless there is credible evidence of a violation of resolution 1701 (2006), including an imminent threat of hostile activity from that location. In situations in which specific information is received regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations, UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, remains determined to act with all means available within its mandate and capabilities. To date, UNIFIL has neither been provided with, nor found, evidence of the unauthorized transfer of arms into its area of operations.

14. UNIFIL observed civilians with unauthorized weapons in the area of operations, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Those mostly involved

individuals carrying hunting weapons. However, there were a number of instances where small arms, including rifles and, at least on one occasion, rocket-propelled grenades, were fired during commemorative events, including funerals. In two such instances, a falling bullet penetrated the roof of the living quarters within a UNIFIL base, causing no injury to personnel. In addition, on 18 March, five men were observed carrying assault rifles at a funeral in the vicinity of Jwayyaa (Sector West). On 25 March, in Srifa (Sector West), UNIFIL observed four men carrying assault rifles. On 26 May, UNIFIL observed two men in separate funeral convoys in Tibnin and Yazire (Sector West) carrying weapons and firing in the air. On 2 June, UNIFIL saw one man with an assault rifle near Marjayoun (Sector East). In all cases, UNIFIL informed the Lebanese Armed Forces of the violations. The Lebanese Armed Forces has primary responsibility for ensuring that the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River is free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons, other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL.

15. UNIFIL continued generally to enjoy full freedom of movement throughout its area of operations, despite three notable incidents. On 7 April, in the vicinity of Majda Zun (Sector West) a group of civilians threw stones at a UNIFIL patrol and one of its vehicles was rammed by another vehicle. On proceeding further, the patrol was blocked in the neighbouring village of Shihin (Sector West) and the UNIFIL personnel were threatened by a larger crowd. The obstruction was cleared after discussions with the local population with the assistance of the Lebanese Armed Forces. UNIFIL strongly protested the incident to the Lebanese Armed Forces. In addition, UNIFIL freedom of movement was obstructed in one instance when a UNIFIL vehicle patrol was denied access to a road close to At Tiri by a group of civilians on 5 April. The Lebanese Armed Forces intervened and the UNIFIL patrol was able to proceed.

16. In a case of unfriendly behaviour on 16 April, a civilian approached UNIFIL military police personnel who were conducting speed checks in the vicinity of Rumaysh, photographed them and demanded their speed detector. The UNIFIL personnel refused to hand over the equipment.

17. On 18 March in the vicinity of Rumaysh, an Israel Defense Forces tank pointed its main weapon across the Blue Line and tracked a foot patrol of Observer Group Lebanon moving approximately 60 metres away. UNIFIL protested the incident to the Israel Defense Forces.

18. UNIFIL relations with the local population remained largely positive as the Mission sought to deepen its cooperation with the communities present in the area of operations. UNIFIL, including the Head of Mission and Force Commander, maintained intensive engagement with local authorities, religious leaders and civil society representatives to promote better understanding of the Mission's mandate and activities. In accordance with the strategic priorities of UNIFIL (see S/2012/151), UNIFIL collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme in organizing training for 50 municipal police officials to further good governance in southern Lebanon. A tree-planting campaign, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, was aimed at reducing the Mission's environmental footprint. UNIFIL also participated in the "Greening the South" campaign, whereby thousands of trees were planted across the area of operations. In addition to no-cost initiatives, work on implementing quick-impact projects continued, and UNIFIL

contingents provided veterinary, medical and dental assistance to the local communities.

19. UNIFIL conducted on average 11,000 operational activities monthly, including patrols, checkpoints and observation tasks. Approximately 10 per cent of UNIFIL activities were carried out in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces south of the Litani River remained generally at the same level of approximately two brigades. UNIFIL conducted 166 joint exercises, workshops and courses with the Lebanese Armed Forces, with the aim of improving the tactical and operational capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces. The joint training efforts further developed the coordination between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces and enhanced the effectiveness of combined operations at operational and tactical levels.

20. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force, in accordance with its mandate, carried out maritime interdiction activities and provided training for the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy. During the reporting period, the Maritime Task Force hailed 1,745 ships and the Lebanese authorities inspected 363 vessels to ensure that no unauthorized weapons or related materiel were transferred into Lebanon. In a continued effort to strengthen the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force conducted a total of 313 trainings and exercises for the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy.

21. The maritime border between Israel and Lebanon is disputed, and incidents in the area occurred that had the potential to increase tensions. During the reporting period, UNIFIL maintained a visible presence in the southern part of its area of maritime operations. UNIFIL has no mandate to monitor the line of buoys, which was unilaterally installed by Israel and is not recognized by the Government of Lebanon. During the reporting period, the Israel Defense Forces carried out frequent maintenance activity at the line of buoys, continuing at times for days. On several occasions, Israel Defense Forces patrol boats, positioned south of the line of buoys, fired machine gun rounds and flares in a westerly direction.

B. Security and liaison arrangements

22. UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements with the parties remain the key mechanism to defuse tensions on the ground and to address issues of mutual concern in order to safeguard the cessation of hostilities, ensure respect for the Blue Line and promote security and stability in southern Lebanon. The parties continue to engage with UNIFIL on all levels in a constructive and positive manner to help reduce tensions. UNIFIL urged the parties to further utilize the liaison and coordination mechanism by providing prior intimation through UNIFIL of any planned activities close to the Blue Line in order to avoid any related misunderstandings or apprehensions. There has been no progress towards the establishment of a UNIFIL liaison office in Tel Aviv.

23. Palestinian commemorations of Land Day, Al-Nakba and An-Naksa took place peacefully on 30 March, 15 May and 5 June after close liaison by UNIFIL with the parties, bilaterally and through the tripartite mechanism, and as the Lebanese authorities continued to exercise control on access and public gatherings near the Blue Line on those occasions.

24. The tripartite forum continues to be convened regularly by UNIFIL with the participation of representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, serving as the Mission's main liaison and coordination tool for addressing all security and military operational issues relating to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). There have been two tripartite meetings, on 18 March and 11 May, since my previous report.

25. The first meeting included a review of the outcomes of the UNIFIL investigations into the 28 January incident, which was transmitted on 17 April to the Israel Defense Forces and to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The UNIFIL investigations reconfirmed the preliminary facts of the incident as set out in paragraphs 9 and 10 of my previous report. In the tripartite meeting, UNIFIL reiterated to the parties its recommendations aimed at, inter alia, preventing any further hostile activity from the UNIFIL area of operations, preserving the integrity of the Blue Line, taking further steps to ensure that no illicit arms are present in the area of operations and protecting the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel.

26. Other areas of focus at the tripartite meetings included ground violations of the Blue Line, Israeli air violations and the lack of progress on the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from northern Ghajar. Israeli allegations of Hizbullah activities near the Blue Line remained a contentious point of discussion between the parties. Both parties expressed renewed interest in engaging bilaterally with UNIFIL to find practical localized solutions to the seasonal violations of the Blue Line.

27. Progress in the visible marking of the Blue Line continued. As at 12 June, the parties had agreed to mark 313 out of a total of 527 Blue Line points. Of the 313 agreed points, UNIFIL demining teams have cleared access to 312 points, 249 of which have been measured. Some 231 Blue Line markers have been constructed and 216 have been verified by both parties.

28. In line with the strategic priorities of UNIFIL to increase the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL continued to support the Lebanese Armed Forces in the implementation of the strategic dialogue plan, which is an integral part of the Lebanese Armed Forces' capabilities development plan and complements the efforts of the International Support Group for Lebanon to bolster the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces. The strategic dialogue steering committee, including representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL, met on 28 April to update a list of the imminent needs of the Lebanese Armed Forces for tasks mandated under resolution 1701 (2006) in the area of operations, to be presented to international donors. The strategic dialogue subcommittee on training decided to adopt the "training of trainers" approach to enhance the sustainability of the joint training activities between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

C. Disarming armed groups

29. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups outside the control of the Lebanese State, in violation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), continues to restrict the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. During the reporting period, Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah acknowledged again publicly that Hizbullah has a substantial and sophisticated military capacity, separate from that of the Lebanese State, which Hizbullah claims serves as a deterrent against potential aggression

from Israel. Recent media reports have quoted Hizbullah sources purporting to show the presence of military capabilities held by Hizbullah in southern Lebanon and Hizbullah's readiness to use such capabilities. There have been no meetings of the National Dialogue during the reporting period and no other formal discussion of Hizbullah's arms among Lebanese parties.

30. Security forces reported several successful operations to prevent terrorist activities and arrest alleged terrorists. Lebanese and Syrian nationals reportedly belonging to a number of organizations, including the Nusra Front and ISIL, were arrested in towns across Lebanon. On 20 May, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device was discovered and disarmed close to a Lebanese Armed Forces checkpoint in Arsal.

31. Negotiations have continued for the release of the 26 hostages held by the Nusra Front and ISIL, amidst concerns that some of the hostages held by ISIL may have been moved to Raqqa in the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, two Lebanese nationals and a Syrian national were arrested on suspicion of having played a role in the abduction of the hostages.

32. There has been no progress on the dismantling of military bases maintained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada. In 2006, it was decided in the National Dialogue that the bases should be dismantled. The existence of the bases continues to compromise Lebanese sovereignty and impede the ability of the State to monitor and control effectively parts of the Lebanese-Syrian border.

33. The situation in the Palestinian camp of Ein el-Helweh has been tense during the reporting period following the murder of a Lebanese national affiliated with the "Hizbullah Resistance Brigades" on 5 April and a series of other assassination attempts. The Joint Security Force continues its efforts to maintain stability in the camp and has now expanded its deployment to additional areas inside the camp.

D. Arms embargo and border control

34. In its resolution 1701 (2006), the Security Council decided that all States should prevent the sale or the supply of arms and related materiel to entities or individuals in Lebanon by their nationals or from their territories or using their flag vessels or aircraft. In the same resolution, the Council also called upon the Government of Lebanon to secure its borders and other entry points so as to prevent the entry into Lebanon without its consent of arms and related materiel.

35. Representatives of the Government of Israel have consistently alleged that there are significant ongoing arms transfers to Hizbullah across the Lebanese-Syrian border, and that Hizbullah has now amassed an arsenal of over 100,000 missiles and rockets, much of which Israel claims is located in civilian residential areas. In a speech on 24 May, Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah stated that Hizbullah possesses the highest military capability since the organization was created and, in the event of an attack by Israel, it is prepared to use its capabilities to respond from both Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations takes the allegations seriously but is not currently in a position to verify them independently.

36. Fighting in the Qalamoun region of the Syrian Arab Republic continued during the reporting period, as did reports of the movement of fighters and arms trafficking across the border between the two countries. Hizbullah has openly acknowledged its engagement in the Qalamoun region and in fighting against the Nusra Front in the un-delineated border area between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, including near the Lebanese towns of Arsal, Brital and Tufayl. A number of funerals for Hizbullah fighters killed in the Syrian Arab Republic were held during the reporting period. There have also been reports of the deaths of Lebanese citizens, including members of the Nusra Front and ISIL, in fighting in the Syrian conflict.

37. During the reporting period, there was an increase in cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon. There were 87 incidents of shooting, 10 incidents of shelling and 10 rockets fired into Lebanon, and at least 22 airstrikes by Syrian Government aircraft on Lebanese territory.

38. The Lebanese Armed Forces deployed along the eastern Lebanese-Syrian border to defend the civilian population living in those areas against infiltration attempts by Syrian armed opposition groups and extremist elements from the Nusra Front and ISIL. On 16 March and 2 April, the Lebanese Armed Forces clashed with armed elements at Wadi Hmeid and prevented them from entering the town of Arsal. On 7 April, Lebanese army units seized a position controlled by the Nusra Front at al Mukhairmeh on the outskirts of Ras Baalbek, where there were further clashes on 16 April. The Lebanese Armed Forces have shelled areas around Arsal to prevent positions from being established around the town. On 4 June the Cabinet authorized the Lebanese Armed Forces to take the measures necessary to defend the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

39. During the reporting period, international support was provided to the Lebanese Armed Forces to enhance its capability to protect Lebanon from terrorist threats and to secure the border with the Syrian Arab Republic. On 20 April, the first shipment of French arms under the $3 billion grant from Saudi Arabia arrived in Lebanon, and other bilateral partners have also provided military equipment and training.

40. While the number of registered refugees remains at approximately the same level as in my previous report, refugees are spread over 1,170 communities across the country, including 55,833 in the UNIFIL area of operations. There are a further 18,849 non-Syrian refugees registered in Lebanon, predominantly from Iraq. There is ongoing implementation of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan and 100 partners are now operating across 55 per cent of Lebanese territory. Some 21,000 Lebanese returnees from the Syrian Arab Republic have also been registered by the International Organization for Migration but estimates suggest that around 50,000 nationals have returned to Lebanon.

41. New entry and residency rules for Syrian nationals since January 2015 restrict admission to Lebanon to all but exceptional humanitarian circumstances. UNHCR was requested by the Government of Lebanon on 5 May 2015 to temporarily suspend new registrations of refugees and to deregister 2,626 refugees from the UNHCR registration database that had been registered since 5 January 2015. UNHCR is presently leading discussions with the Ministry of Social Affairs on future modalities to assist registered Syrian refugees.

42. Conditions for refugees in Lebanon are deteriorating. Refugees remain at risk of eviction from their dwellings and face increased challenges in residing legally in Lebanon, making them increasingly vulnerable to arrest and other forms of abuse. Women and children constitute 80 per cent of the refugee population. There continue to be reports of early and forced marriage, and survival sex, particularly among refugee women and girls. Two thirds of the 53,000 children born to Syrian refugee parents since March 2011 do not have a birth certificate.

43. Over the course of the past five months, funding shortfalls have reduced food assistance to Syrian refugees by 60 per cent and over 103,000 Syrians no longer receive cash assistance. Over 300,000 refugee children remain without access to any education programmes. On 16 April, the Ministry of Education committed to doubling enrolment rates by increasing enrolment of 200,000 children in formal education and facilitating the admission of a further 100,000 refugee children in accelerated learning programmes, contingent upon international financing.

44. Very few individual Palestine refugees have entered Lebanon from the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period following the restrictions imposed on their entry by the Government of Lebanon in May 2014. The total number of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic in Lebanon remains stable at 45,150 registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Those refugees continue to face restrictions on renewing their legal status in Lebanon. On 22 May, cuts to assistance were announced for the Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, who will have their $100 cash assistance for shelter suspended in July 2015. An estimated 3,000 Palestinian refugee children are currently out of school.

E. Landmines and cluster bombs

45. Five manual mine clearance teams, one explosives ordnance disposal team and one mechanical mine clearance team from UNIFIL troop-contributing countries were validated and deployed in the UNIFIL area of operations. UNIFIL cleared more than 468 square metres of contaminated land to provide access to Blue Line points during the period from 28 February 2015 to 10 June 2015. In addition, 15 anti-personnel mines were located and destroyed. Furthermore, the United Nations Mine Action Service team conducted 12 validation events, 26 quality assurance visits to operational or completed sites, 6 training support events and 113 coordination meetings, briefings and demonstrations.

46. During the reporting period, three incidents related to explosive remnants of war and landmines occurred in the UNIFIL area of operations. An explosion on 27 March, near Zibqin (Sector West), that was apparently caused by a cluster munition, resulted in the death of one child and injured four other children. On 14 April, near Blida (Sector East), a civilian who walked into a marked minefield lost his leg upon activating an anti-personnel mine. On 26 May, in Maroun ar Ras (Sector West), a civilian truck using a local road was damaged by an anti-personnel mine.

F. Delineation of borders

47. No progress was made towards the delineation or demarcation of the Lebanese-Syrian border during the reporting period, including in areas where it is uncertain or disputed, as called for in Security Council resolutions 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). Extending the authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout all Lebanese territory and enabling the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces to secure borders to prevent the entry of arms or related materiel necessitates the delineation and demarcation of the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as practicable.

48. There has also been no progress on the issue of the Shab'a Farms. In a letter dated 16 March addressed to me (S/2015/184), the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic stated that the delineation of borders in the Shab'a Farms area should take place after the Israeli occupation of that area has come to an end in accordance with relevant resolutions. There has still been no reaction to the provisional definition of that area contained in my report of 30 October 2007 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2007/641) from either Israel or the Syrian Arab Republic.

III. Security and safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

49. UNIFIL continuously reviewed its security plans and risk mitigation measures and closely coordinated them with the Lebanese authorities. Force protection works to upgrade installations and assets are ongoing. Stringent security measures remain in force in a part of Sector East of the UNIFIL area of operations.

50. UNIFIL continued to monitor proceedings at the Lebanese Military Court against individuals suspected of planning or perpetrating serious attacks against UNIFIL. In the case of a serious attack against Spanish peacekeepers in 2007, the investigation against an arrested suspect has been concluded. In the case of a serious attack perpetrated in 2008, a hearing at the Military Court of Appeal was conducted on 17 March 2015, and the next hearing is scheduled to take place on 1 October 2015. In three cases of serious attacks perpetrated in 2011, the investigation is ongoing. In a case of terror intent opened in January 2014, a hearing at the Permanent Military Court is scheduled to take place on 10 July 2015. With a view to enhancing the Mission's cooperation with the highest judicial authorities, the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander met with the President of the Supreme Judicial Council, the Prosecutor General and officials from the Military Court on 22 May.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

51. As at 31 May 2015, UNIFIL consisted of 10,463 military personnel from 39 troop-contributing countries, including 398 women, as well as 272 international and 600 national civilian staff, including 82 and 150 women, respectively. In addition, 52 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, including 4 women, are also part of UNIFIL. UNIFIL is working to

increase the number of civilian and military women deployed, with a view to reducing the gender imbalance in the Mission.

V. Observations

52. I welcome the current calm and stability in the UNIFIL area of operations and along the Blue Line, particularly as it follows the serious breach of the cessation of hostilities that took place on 28 January. I am concerned, however, by the escalatory media and public statements from Israel and Hizbullah, which contribute to a climate of tension. Renewed armed conflict is not inevitable. Both the Israeli and Lebanese Governments have a responsibility, and indeed an obligation, to promote stability, take all possible steps to prevent any risk of incident that could jeopardize the cessation of hostilities and make good on their commitment to implement fully resolution 1701 (2006) in all its provisions. I therefore renew my call on all concerned to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and threats of the use of force that heighten the risk of escalation and miscalculation. I take this opportunity to recall the consequences of the 2006 conflict and the even more dangerous scale of any renewed confrontation and to remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law.

53. The Security Council has repeatedly called upon both Israel and Lebanon to take concrete steps towards a permanent ceasefire and the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). In an increasingly volatile regional environment, and in the light of the heightened risks of miscalculation, meaningful progress towards the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) is more important than ever. Building on the confidence that has been established through the work of my Special Coordinator and UNIFIL, I call on both parties to make a renewed, concerted effort towards resolving the outstanding provisions of the resolution. I stand ready to assist the parties in that regard. I also urge the parties to continue actively participating in UNIFIL conflict-prevention and confidence-building initiatives in order to keep southern Lebanon and the Blue Line stable. There are steps that the parties could take to build confidence and I ask them to seize the moment to find agreement on practical localized arrangements that would mitigate the risk for tension and incidents along the Blue Line.

54. I regret that there has been no progress on the Shab'a Farms area in accordance with paragraph 10 of resolution 1701 (2006). Recent developments on the ground have shown the potential for destabilization that comes from not addressing that issue and underscore the need for constructive progress rather than further delays. I reiterate my call on the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel to submit their responses to the provisional definition of the Shab'a Farms area that I provided in my report of 30 October 2007, and I encourage the parties to work with my Special Coordinator and with UNIFIL to achieve resolution of the issue.

55. The occupation of northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line by the Israel Defense Forces is a continuing violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Israel has an obligation to withdraw its armed forces from the area, in accordance with the resolution. I urge the Israeli authorities to take steps to that end and encourage them to make further use of the presence of UNIFIL and its liaison and coordination apparatus to facilitate a smooth and secure withdrawal from the area.

56. It remains a matter of serious concern that Israel continues to violate Lebanese airspace on an almost daily basis, in complete disregard of the sovereignty of Lebanon and the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). I once again call on the Government of Israel to cease all overflights of Lebanese territory and territorial waters.

57. I also remind the Lebanese authorities of their primary responsibility to ensure that the area between the Litani River and the Blue Line is free of unauthorized weapons. Recent incidents involving the use of assault weapons, small arms and rocket-propelled grenades, and the missile attack on 28 January by Hizbullah on an Israeli military convoy across the Blue Line, demonstrate that unauthorized weapons are still present in the area. Those incidents, coupled with Hizbullah's self-declared capabilities in the south, are of grave concern. I once again call on the Lebanese authorities to ensure that there are no unauthorized weapons in the UNIFIL area of operations, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

58. There continues to be progress on the visible marking of the Blue Line owing to the commitment from both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces. I encourage the parties to continue working on finding points of agreement through constructive engagement with UNIFIL, including in relation to those stretches of the Blue Line where marking is deemed contentious by the parties. The visible marking of the Blue Line enhances the monitoring of violations and greatly contributes to its integrity. I also remind all parties that full respect for the Blue Line is a critical factor in maintaining stability and calm in the area and that any deliberate violation of the Blue Line is unacceptable.

59. I am deeply concerned that the vacuum in the presidency of the country continues to seriously undermine the ability of Lebanon to address the security, economic and social challenges facing the country. I commend Prime Minister Salam's leadership in upholding the unity of Government and call on all parties to work constructively to enable the Government to function effectively. I call on all Lebanese leaders to adhere to its Constitution and to the Taif Agreement and National Pact, to put aside partisan politics by placing the country's stability and national interests first and to show the necessary leadership and flexibility to elect a president. The presidency is and must remain a Lebanese process, free from foreign interference. At the same time, it is crucial that international support for Lebanon is paralleled by meaningful action by the country's political leaders. The continued boycott of parliamentary sessions by members of Parliament undermines the country's democratic tradition. Members of Parliament should fulfil their obligation and convene to elect a president without further delay.

60. I remain deeply concerned by the threat posed by violent extremist groups to the Lebanese population living in eastern areas bordering the Syrian Arab Republic. I highly commend the strong and determined role of the Lebanese Armed Forces in protecting the country's border areas and defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and for upholding its independence as the sole legitimate State institution in that regard. I also reiterate my call on those holding Lebanese soldiers and security service personnel hostage to release them immediately. I urge all Lebanese political leaders to remain united in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces and to avoid creating further vacuums in senior military and security positions at this crucial time for the country's security and stability.

61. I welcome the ongoing international support to the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces to strengthen their capability to address the multiple security challenges Lebanon faces. I note that it advances a key component of work of the International Support Group for Lebanon. In that regard, I welcome the arrival of the first shipment of French support to the Lebanese Armed Forces under the generous grant from Saudi Arabia, as well as continuing bilateral assistance from the United States of America and others. I encourage bilateral partners and donors to continue their support where the Lebanese Armed Forces is most critically in need in order to give it the necessary operational advantage to effectively address security threats, including for counter-terrorism and the further capability to deploy along the country's borders, as well as in the context of the strategic dialogue plan as an integral part of the Lebanese Armed Forces' capabilities development plan.

62. I condemn the shelling, shooting and aerial incursions into Lebanese border areas from the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the movement of armed fighters and war materiel between the countries. The lack of a delineated, demarcated border between the two countries is no justification for the continued violations of the sovereignty of Lebanon. I call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and groups fighting in the Qalamoun and other areas bordering Lebanon to cease such violations and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

63. I condemn the participation of Lebanese citizens in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic in breach of the policy of disassociation adopted by the Government of Lebanon and of the principles in the Baabda Declaration, which had been agreed by all of the country's political parties in June 2012 and the importance of which has been reaffirmed by the Security Council. I call on all Lebanese parties to step back from any involvement in the Syrian conflict, consistent with their commitments in that regard.

64. I am increasingly concerned at rising radicalization in the region and the threat it poses to Lebanon. I welcome dialogue between Lebanese parties aimed at easing tensions between and within communities and encourage the country's leaders to proactively advocate for moderation and compromise during this difficult period. In a context of polarization, the proliferation of arms outside of the authority of the Lebanese State is a serious threat to stability and security. I call on Member States to uphold their obligation under resolution 1701 (2006) to prevent the sale or supply of arms or related materiel to entities or individuals in Lebanon.

65. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups outside the control of the State continues to pose a threat to Lebanese sovereignty and stability, and contradicts the country's obligations under resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Lebanon cannot afford the serious unforeseen consequences of the use of those arms should they provoke conflict. It is vital that once a new president is elected the National Dialogue meet again as a matter of priority to address issues of national importance, including the arms held by Hizbullah and other groups. It remains important that earlier decisions of the National Dialogue be implemented, specifically those relating to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada.

66. The need to support the Lebanese judicial and security authorities is clear, and I urge them to continue their efforts to combat impunity. In that regard, I note the decision of 13 May sentencing former Minister Michel Samaha to prison for his part

in a plot to foment sectarian violence in Lebanon. I also call on all parties to cooperate fully with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The continuing trial sends a message that impunity will not be tolerated.

67. I thank the Member States participating in the International Support Group for Lebanon for their continued commitment and welcome the Group's statement following the meeting convened on 19 May by Prime Minister Salam at the Grand Serail and co-chaired by my Special Coordinator. With the continued united support of the Security Council as expressed in its presidential statement of 19 March 2015 (S/PRST/2015/7), the Group remains an important forum to ensure strong, coordinated support for Lebanese resilience and generate momentum for the assistance urgently needed to preserve stability and security in the country. That support is particularly important to maintain given the increasing pressures on Lebanon and the growing threats from regional developments. I encourage the Group to continue to look for opportunities to meet at the appropriate level to engage on its support agenda.

68. Five years into the Syrian crisis, I acknowledge the continued efforts by Lebanon to host and assist refugees. I take note of the Government's latest decisions and urge the Lebanese authorities to continue working closely with the United Nations, especially UNHCR, and partners, including the upholding of human rights and humanitarian principles. On 31 March, I attended the Third International Pledging Conference for Syria, held in Kuwait City, where international donors pledged $3.8 billion to address the humanitarian needs caused by the Syrian conflict. Given the scale of the refugee crisis in Lebanon and the potentially serious implications for the country's future stability, I reiterate my call on donors to respond generously and as a matter of urgency to aid the country's ability to manage its refugee crisis. As at 26 May, only 21 per cent of the $2.1 billion in funding requirements for the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan had been met.

69. I welcome the continued commitment of the Palestinian leadership to disassociate the Palestinian camps in Lebanon from the violence in the region. The need to improve the living conditions of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, without prejudice to the resolution of the refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement, is ever more urgent. Palestine refugees displaced in Lebanon from the Syrian Arab Republic are becoming increasingly vulnerable. I encourage donors to be forthcoming in their support of UNRWA to enable it to effectively assist them.

70. For both Lebanon and Israel, exploration and development of their respective offshore oil and gas resources are national priorities. During the reporting period, both countries indicated their wish to resolve the dispute over the maritime exclusive economic zone, though no progress was made in that regard. I again encourage both Lebanon and Israel to proceed with steps that would allow for resolution of that issue and reiterate that the United Nations stands ready to assist if both parties so request.

71. The challenges to the stability and security of Lebanon have become more complex, including as a result of the situation in the region. The United Nations is working as one in Lebanon with Lebanese and international partners to address multiple challenges to peace and security, on stabilization and on the provision of vital humanitarian and developmental support, with a strong and tangible commitment to human rights. Particular emphasis is also placed on the needs of vulnerable Lebanese host communities. I encourage all stakeholders to work with

my Special Coordinator and UNIFIL to achieve those goals through such a holistic approach aimed at the whole of Lebanon. Progress on the implementation of outstanding relevant Security Council resolutions will be central to longer-term solutions to end conflict in the region, and to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

72. I extend my sincere appreciation to all Member States contributing troops and equipment to UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. I thank my Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, and the personnel of their respective missions, all of whom continue to play a critical role in helping to promote stability along the Blue Line and in Lebanon at a critical time for the country and for the region.